

Child Placement Review Board

OF THE STATE OF DELAWARE



2009 Annual Report

July 2008 - June 2009

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THIRTY YEARS OF SERVICE TO DELAWARE'S CHILDREN



Since 1979, the Child Placement Review Board* has been serving Delaware's child welfare system by holding regular, independent reviews of the status of individual children in foster care. The Board was chartered to advocate for a permanent home or placement for each child in foster care, to monitor provision of services—medical, educational, and social—to children in foster care, and to avoid "foster care drift," in which children remain in care year after year without plans or progress toward adoption or other permanent placement. Additionally, since 1999, the Board has reviewed the status of youthful offenders remanded by Family Court to residential treatment facilities as well as non-adjudicated youth in such facilities. In its 30 years of service, the Board has completed nearly 40,000 reviews.

Equally important, independent reviews are one method of monitoring the State's child welfare system as a whole, noting overall trends such as the number of different placements for children in care, goals set by the Division of Family Services (DFS) for individual children, and length of time in the system. By monitoring changes, the Board is able to comment on trends within the child welfare system and the State's overall success in addressing the needs of the children in its care. Based on the data it collects, the Board can also act as an advocate for children in care.

**Originally chartered as the Foster Care Review Board, the name was changed in 2000 to reflect an expansion of duties.*

This report reflects the dual missions of the Child Placement Review Board: first, serving individual children by tracking case management and outcomes and, second, serving the State by evaluating the effectiveness of its child welfare system and advocating for change as needed. Under law, these analyses are offered to the Governor, members of the General Assembly, professionals in the child welfare system, and the general public. The report is also posted on the internet site of the CPRB, www.courts.delaware.gov/cprb.

REVIEW AND FINDINGS: CHILDREN IN FOSTER CARE

Delaware's children in foster care are under the supervision of the Department of Services for Children, Youth, and Their Families (DSCYF); each child is served by a DFS caseworker. During the course of FY2009, 1360 children were in the foster care system; this number reflects children who were in the system for the whole year as well as those who entered and left the system and those who entered, left, and re-entered.

The CPRB conducted 903 reviews of 752 children in foster care. Reviews are normally conducted when a child has been in care for 10 months, repeated at 18 months and yearly thereafter.

Overall, data from this year's reviews are remarkably similar to data from FY2007 and FY2008, indicating the intractability of concerns raised in earlier reports, including the high turnover rate in placements, the large number of older children in foster care, and the heavy reliance on the goal of Alternative Planned Permanent Living Arrangement (APPLA).



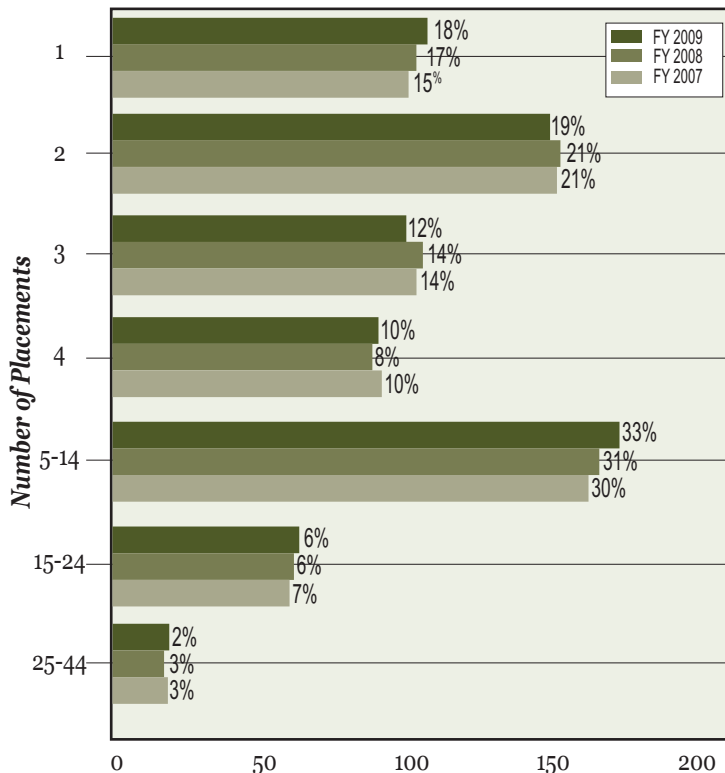
Turnover in placements simply means that a child is moved from one placement (foster home, group home, specialized facility and so on) to another. Among the 752 individual children reviewed, 177 (24%) had lived in five to nine settings. Leaving a placement means disruption—loss of routine, interruption of relationships,

new rules and unfamiliar caregivers and, often, a new school. Frequent change of placement leads to confusion, anxiety, and an inability to form lasting relationships—even when the change in placement has been made in hopes of improving a child’s setting, obtaining additional services, preventing unwholesome friendships, or when the change is made upon achieving a permanent placement, such as guardianship or adoption.

The data on number of placements also show that more than half of Delaware’s foster children have been placed in four or more settings—and that 8% of children have endured 15 or more changes in living circumstances. Once again, the CPRB urges DFS to redouble its efforts



to achieve stability in foster care placements so children in the system can learn to develop long-term relationships, which are essential for emotional health.



APPLA: A CONTINUING PROBLEM

Over-reliance on the goal of Alternative Planned Permanent Living Arrangement—that is, saying that a child will remain in foster care until reaching majority—continues to be the most troubling aspect of Delaware’s foster care system. This situation was highlighted in a federal Child and Family Services Review of Delaware’s foster care system in April 2007, when 38% of the foster children had a goal of APPLA. The report pointed out that this goal fails to serve the long-term needs of many foster children. Regrettably, in FY2009, 37% of foster children still have the APPLA goal, which hinders efforts to achieve other long-term arrangements, such as guardianship or family reunification.

The CPRB collected data specific to foster children with the goal of APPLA during the first half of FY2009. These data highlight some alarming realities. Among these are:

- Only 39% of foster children with the APPLA goal are expected to graduate from high school or earn a GED certificate.
- Nearly two-thirds of this population (61%) is eligible for special education services.
- More than a quarter (27%) of those eligible for special education services are not receiving them.
- Sixty-one percent (61%) of children with this goal will spend at least four additional years in the foster care system before aging out at 18.
- Seventy percent (70%) of these children have been in foster care for less than 18 months when their exit goal is changed to APPLA.
- More than half of those with the goal of APPLA (55%) have had only one other permanency goal; for most, that goal has been reunification. This means that if an initial attempt to reunify the family fails, DFS apparently determines that no other viable option exists and foster care will be a child’s life until the age of 18.
- An APPLA goal means that the child will continue in foster care until aging out, but it does not mean that a given placement will be permanent. Only 40% of children remained 12 months or more in the placement where they were living when they received the

APPLA goal; a full 60% of the children with an APPLA designation were moved to a new placement within a year of receiving the APPLA goal.

- Nearly one fourth of the APPLA children (23%) have never had another permanency goal, not even reunification with their families. When they entered foster care, DFS determined that they would remain in care until age 18.



In practical terms, assigning the APPLA goal equates to diminished educational expectations, continuing placement turnover, and an exit plan for the child that does not include family or long-term connections, all occurring while the State shoulders ongoing responsibility for the child until the age of majority.

To begin to remedy this situation, the CPRB urges DFS to:

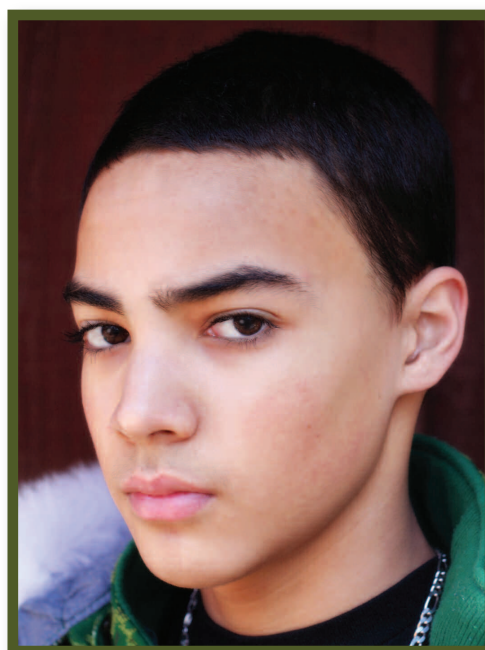
- Develop strategies to increase the number of children for whom adoption is a realistic goal.
- Set more stringent parameters that must be met before the goal of APPLA can be applied. For example, develop a protocol to ensure that all other avenues for permanent outcomes have been explored with both diligence and creativity; this could include exploring relationships between the child and non-parental adults to see if one of them would be willing to be at least part of a long-term solution.
- Develop a protocol suggesting that the child be in a placement that is anticipated as permanent when the exit goal is changed to APPLA, thus reducing turnover for children in this group.
- Improve understanding of why placements get disrupted, and develop specific strategies to sustain foster care placements and reduce the number of settings a child lives in during foster care.
- Expand efforts to sustain permanent placements by creating additional ongoing support services for families willing to provide permanent homes.

The goal of APPLA should be used sparingly—not for more than one-third of the children in foster care. APPLA is a useful goal for specific situations in which reunification, guardianship, and adoption have been explored and ruled out and in which true permanency can be achieved in a placement. As long as APPLA is used as a catch-all designation, individual children will be penalized, child welfare costs will continue to escalate, and the overall success of the State’s child welfare system will be undermined.

The Child Placement Review Board is committed to partnering with other interested agencies in seeking workable and creative solutions that will reduce the reliance on APPLA as an exit goal and increase the options for true permanency for children in foster care.

ADJUDICATED YOUTH: REVIEW AND FINDINGS

In addition to its work on behalf of children in foster care, the CPRB reviews the placements of adjudicated youth in residential treatment facilities. These reviews are intended to help ensure that treatment for issues that contributed to the child’s delinquency, including behavioral management concerns, sex offenses, and chemical dependency, is being furnished in accordance with the orders of Family Court and the best interests of the child. Adjudicated youth are under the purview of the Division of Youth Rehabilitative Services (YRS); a YRS caseworker is assigned to each case. These reviews occur at the 6-month mark and yearly thereafter.



During FY2009, 35 YRS youth were reviewed. The demographics of this group are consistent with those of previous years: seven were female and 28 male. The majority of adjudicated youth continue to be African Americans males aged 15 or older.



Twenty-two of those remanded to treatment facilities were sent for sex offender treatment, and twelve were sent for behavior management. Only four of these youth were being treated in Delaware; eleven were being treated in Pennsylvania. YRS has made significant progress in placing adjudicated youth closer to home in recent years, but some young offenders are still located at considerable distances: in Florida, Minnesota, South Dakota, and Indiana.

Long-distance placements mean that family visits are infrequent or impossible, and opportunities for family involvement in therapy are compromised. While the CPRB congratulates YRS on progress to date, the Board encourages continuing efforts to place these youth in facilities within 100 miles of home.

The CPRB also reviews adjudicated youth who have been placed in settings with non-adjudicated youth; these “mixing” reviews are intended to ensure the safety and healthy development of non-adjudicated youth. Ten mixing reviews were held during FY2009.

SCHOLARSHIP SUCCESSES

The CPRB administers the Ivyane D.F. Davis Scholarship and partners with DFS to administer the federal Educational and Training Vouchers (ETV) program, both of which support post-secondary education for former foster children in Delaware. In FY2009, 51 recipients received a total of \$129,058. Of these, 21 attended four-year colleges, 26 were enrolled in community colleges, and 4 were in post-secondary trade or vocational schools. Three students graduated from four-year colleges, one from a two-year program, and one from a trade school. Post-secondary education can be the foundation for success in the larger world for former foster children. One

example of this kind of success is Dane Cox, who had the lead in a number of musicals while at Christiana High School. With support from the Davis Scholarship and the ETV program, Dane attended the University of the Arts in Philadelphia, from which he graduated in June with the Vocal Award. He is now enrolled in the master’s degree program at the Manhattan School of Music. A tenor with experience in a range of musical styles, Dane is poised, confident, and hard-working. He credits the CPRB, the scholarship program, his last foster-care placement, and his Independent Living caseworker with helping him focus on such a positive future.



THE CPRB

The CPRB operates with a small staff of professionals to support the volunteer efforts of members of the Executive Committee and the 14 Review Committees. During FY2009, the volunteer members of the CPRB contributed 3,438 hours to reviews and training.

CPRB staff and Board members pay tribute to Patricia Clarke, a longtime staff member known for her good cheer and helpfulness. Pat died on April 5, 2009.



The CPRB is proud to have built a record of commitment and achievement by offering consistent, caring, and well-informed service to Delaware’s children in care for the last thirty years.

CPRB Members

New Castle 1

Linda Hartzel*
Lenora Bennefield
Marion Gibbs
Anne Kauffman
Mary Morgan
Quenna Neal

New Castle 2

Nancy Czeiner*
Caroline Bither
Nancy D'Orazio
Lou Himelreich
Katie Ryan

New Castle 3

Sandra Countley*
Lillian McGowan
Bill Miller
Sunnie Moon
Carol Stewart
Barbara Williams

New Castle 4

Robert Hamilton*
Rita Anderson
Phyllis Faulkner
Helen Rubin

New Castle 5

Jeanmarie Leonard*
Tanya Bell-Hynson
Bonita Herring
Elma Jackson
Lisa Seel

New Castle 6

Kellie Fresolone*
Christy DiGuglielmo
Mildred Hamilton
Mary Jane Johnson
Carolyn Karney

New Castle 8

Judith Miller*
Arlene Cronin
Ann Southmayd

New Castle 9

Susan Schneider*
Mary Angerer
Joan Chandler

Kent 1

William Moyer*
David Miller
Cindy Montejo
Bruce Morris
Mike Rezac
Rodney Smith

Kent 2

Gail Allen*
Charles Carter
Evelyn Figueroa
Wilberta Lewis
Tambra Parker
Candice Swetland

Kent 3

Mary Austria*
Mary Hauck
Candace Mebane
Linda Paradee
Dana Stonesifer

Kent/Sussex

Virginia VanSciver*
Dave Dagenais
Bonnie Maull
Judy Mellen
Ray Moore

Sussex 1

Tiffany Derrickson*
O.D. Basinski
Louise Henry
Sandra Lord
Patricia Lyons

Sussex 3

John (Michael) Norton*
Gary Breakwell
Cora Norwood Selby
Ruth Tull

FY2009 Resignations

Ronnie Bythwood
Sue Fuller
Ellen Holler
Martha Keller
Eleanor Kiesel
Elaine Markell
Pam Meyer

FY2009

New Board Members

Mary Angerer
Martha Brooks
Joan Chandler
Christy DiGuglielmo
Mary Hauck
Katie Kramedas
Patricia Lyons
Tambra Parker
Helen Rubin
Katie Ryan
Lisa Seel
Ruth Tull

Executive Committee

Bill Murray, Board Chair
Virginia VanSciver, 1st Vice Chair
Janice Baly, 2nd Vice Chair
Gail Allen
Barbara Blair
Martha Brooks
Carolyn Karney
Katie Kramedas
Bonnie Maull
Sunnie Moon
Don Schneck

* Presiding Officer



CPRB Staff

Julia Pearce, Executive Director

Linda Lampinen, Review and Training Supervisor

Lisa Cookson, Denise Partridge, Betsy Trudell, Amy Wilburn, Review Coordinators

Nancy Ripple and Teresa Willoughby, Support Staff